NOSTALGIA

Rhino rides, super sweeps, and the hidden heroes of the home front

***MIKE PETTY** AND **JAMES MILNER** LOOK THROUGH THE **CAMBRIDGE NEWS** ARCHIVES AT SOME OF THE STORIES FROM THIS DAY IN THE PAST*

The first patient at Histon VAD

■ Wentworth rhino rides – 1987

EVERY time it rains, the congregation of Wentworth church has to get out the buckets.

Now, with winter fast approaching, parishioners fear the bad weather will wreak havoc with St Peter's Church, parts of which date back to the 12th century.

The Rev Richard Mathews, the priest in charge, says repairs will cost about £20,000 – but villagers are rallying round organising a fete with "Rhino rides" – a trip in an open-top, four-wheel drive vehicle over rough ground – as well as welly throwing, stalls, and sideshows.

■ Chimney super clean – 1947

A DEVICE by which chimneys can be cleaned without leaving any soot or dirt in the room is being tried out in Cambridge by Super Clean from Hartington Grove.

I understand the customary method of chimney sweeping is followed. The difference is that a device is fitted right over the stove, thus preventing soot from flying into the room.

The main difficulty is that of adapting it to fit the many different sizes and types of grate.

It costs more and takes longer to have chimneys swept this way.

An ordinary chimney sweep costs 6s and it takes three-quarters of an hour to do the job – maybe longer.

As a symbol of the cleanliness of the method, the operator arrives at your door in a short white jacket.

■ Fire at Cambridge Motor Co – 1927

DAMAGE estimated at £2,000 was caused by a fire that broke out at the Cambridge Motor Service Co in Hobson Street.

The night watchman found that the motorcycle department, which also stored several cars, was alight. Among the vehicles that were badly burned were a Bugatti racing car, an Austin Seven, a Trojan van and a number of motorcycles and bicycles.

Some people returning from the New Theatre were attracted down Hobson Street and watched the fire brigade at work.

■ Cambridgeshire's Voluntary Aid Detachments – 1919

ON September 24, 1919, the Cambridge Chronicle devoted several columns to a description by Alex Wood of one of the Voluntary Aid Detachments, painting a notable record of work in days of peace and of war.

It had started in 1912 with a course of lectures on first aid to members of the St Columba's Mission Young Men's Club.

With the arrival of war in August 1914, a Voluntary Aid Detachment was formed. It was necessary to obtain and train at least 45 men, as Mr Wood recalled

They were trained in first aid, stretcher drills, tent pitching, field sanitation, and construction, and were taught how to use camp kitchens.

They had no uniforms and only one regulation stretcher but provided themselves with a second stretcher, a cap, and a haversack for each member. Recruits poured in and training had to be organised.

It soon became clear that the first duty would be to transport wounded soldiers from the station to the first Eastern General Hospital.

No ambulances were available, so a list of motor lorries and spring vans which could be used for transport was made, and the detachment carpenters were set to prepare fittings of larch poles, which could be inserted and used to sling the stretchers.

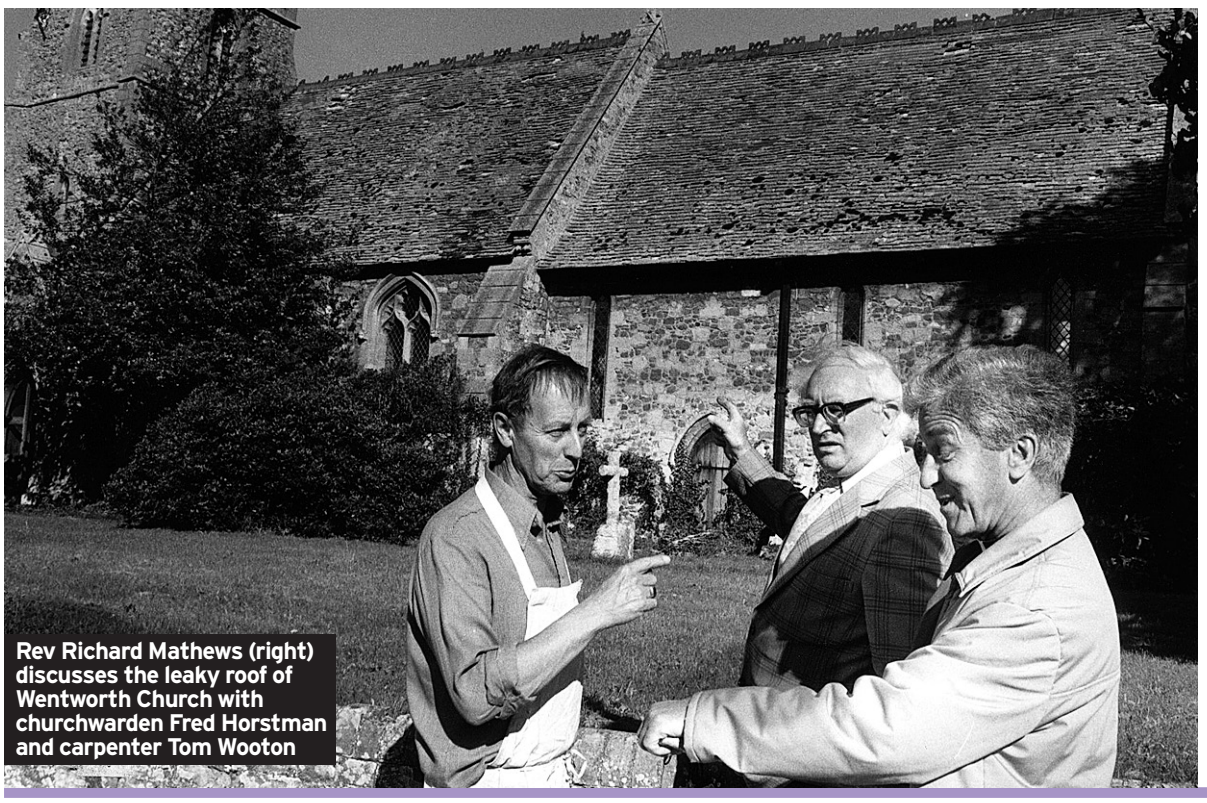
When the first train arrived one ambulance was available and, in a quite creditable time, the carriages were cleared and the men safely conveyed to Neville's Court at Trinity College.

During the war, the detachment met 106 trains and unloaded 12,516 cases.

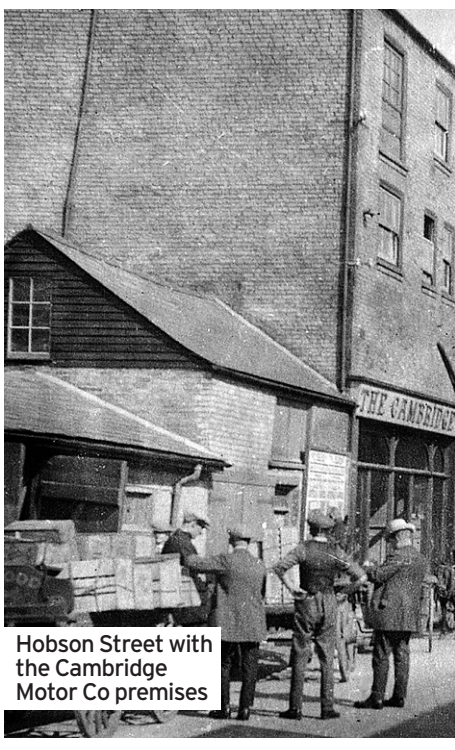
It soon became clear that the War Office had nothing more heroic for them than the unloading of wounded at Cambridge Station so that the great majority of the original members of the detachment transferred to the RAMC and to combatant units. Their place was taken by an excellent body of older men from the University Press.

As the requirements of the Military Service Acts became more and more stringent, men previously exempted were continually being called up for the army and, in the end, the detachment consisted for the most part of lads under 18 and men over 40.

In July 1915, Wordsworth Grove Red Cross Hospital was opened and assistance was willingly given.



Rev Richard Mathews (right) discusses the leaky roof of Wentworth Church with churchwarden Fred Horstman and carpenter Tom Wooton



Hobson Street with the Cambridge Motor Co premises